



Word from the Group Chair

Waste Update—In February you were promised a follow up report on waste management in San Antonio. In May, the Alamo Area Council of Governments hosted the South Texas Resource Recovery Roundtable Conference titled “Zero Waste? What’s

the Status in 2013?” Several Alamo Sierrans went hoping to get answers. However, the reports were general and our Waste Management Director David McCary did not stay for Q&A. We heard reports on recycling from the cities of San Antonio (SA), Austin, and New Braunfels and have some promising news to report.

The best news came out of Austin, San Antonio’s arch rival for the greenest city in Texas. Austin is doing better than SA because they have been faster to adopt a zero waste policy and best practices, in most areas.

In an inspired move their waste department was renamed Austin Resource Recovery Department (ARRD). Since words are so powerful, this change is expected to influence perceptions and actions. We can hope that SA will take up the challenge and rename its Solid Waste Management Division (SWMD) too. How about SA Resource Responsibility Department? Or, since we have a zero waste policy, SA Zero Waste Department?

Austin has now reached a 38% recycling rate. SA’s is 29%, so Austin’s rate is 35% higher than SA’s. Austin is on track to reach a recycling goal of 50% by 2015. SA’s goal is 60% by 2025, recently set back from 2020, due to political pressure.

Austin implemented a variable rate plan (VRP), often referred to as pay-as-you-throw. ARRD’s plan offers a choice of four different cart sizes, from a low of 24 gallons for \$13.50 to a high of 96 gallons for \$33.50 a month, plus \$4 stickers for overflow trash bags. That way those who generate more waste pay more, those who help prevent waste pay less. Other Texas cities with VRPs and higher recycling rates than SA are Fort Worth, 32%; Denton, 37%; and Plano, 38%. McCary reported that SA plans to implement VRP in 2017 and expects VRP to deliver 15% of all recyclables.

Another bit of great news is Austin banned plastic bags in March, joining seven other Texas cities with bans. Fortunately the “Shopping Bag Freedom Act,” HB 2416, that was introduced in the legislature to kill Austin’s [new disposable bag ban](#), and threaten others, did not make it out of committee. The Texas Retailers Association initiated a lawsuit too, which it is unlikely to win, according to a UT Austin School of Law publication, [Plastic bag bans likely to spread, regardless of pending lawsuit or legislation](#). Dallas has a bag ban under

consideration now. Meanwhile, for 18 months, Alamo Sierrans have been collecting hundreds of signatures urging SA to adopt a plastic bag fee (though we would be happier with a ban).

To be fair, SA has bested Austin in earlier programs for curbside composting—the first in Texas, claimed easy to use by 90% of program participants, and expected to increase recycling by 15%—and multifamily recycling. SA is committed to a zero waste pathway, is studying how to adapt to best practices, is exploring implementation of construction and demolition debris recovery, and eliciting aid from progressive local companies, among other practices. Our SWMD is keenly aware of diminishing landfill space, growing not-in-my-backyard, or NIMBY, landfill sentiments, and the fact that SA produces enough waste annually to fill the Dallas Cowboy’s Stadium (104 million cubic feet)—10% of all Texas landfilled waste.

—By Margaret Day, Chairperson,
Executive Committee of Alamo Group

Events

For updates on all events check the Alamo Group [website](#).

Alamo Group membership meetings

Third Tuesday each month, 6:30 pm at the Witte Museum, 3801 Broadway. Free and open to the public. Bring your dead batteries and place in the recycling box provided by the Group.

Lion’s Field events

Fourth Wednesday each month, 6:30 pm, at the Lion’s Field Adult Center, 2809 Broadway at Mulberry. Free and open to the public.

Sierra Socials: Let’s Party!

Drinks, food and fun. If planning to attend contact Loyd Cortez, 674-9489, loydcortez@earthlink.net.

Event Schedule

July 16 Tuesday: membership meeting

Pot Luck Party with Poetry. Socializing begins at 6 pm. We had such a great time last year that poet naturalist Mobi Warren has agreed to host this again. We have local poets Bryce Milligan, Jim LaVilla-Havelin, Lahab Assef Al-Jundi, Carol Repos, and Mobi. Also, Mobi will facilitate a short and fun haiku exercise so everyone will leave with a personal nature poem in their pocket.

So join us for this special event and meet your fellow members. Your club will provide ice tea and watermelon; please bring your favorite dish to share.

July 24 Wednesday: at Lion’s Field

Adventure Travels by Alan Montemayor. Alan will tell us about his latest adventure: hiking in Southern Patagonia,

visiting Iguazu Falls and cruising Antarctica. His presentations are fantastic; don't miss this one.

July 26 Friday: Let's Party!

At Timbo's, 6-8 pm. 1639 Broadway at Pearl Parkway, 223-1028, timbosburgers.com.

Aug 20 Tuesday: membership meeting

The Inner Workings of the Edwards Aquifer by Geary M. Schindel.

The Edwards Aquifer is one of the most prolific karst aquifers in the United States and was the first sole source aquifer designated by the US EPA, and has some unique biology and unusual hydrology. This talk will cover the natural history of the aquifer - groundwater recharge, flowpaths, water quality, groundwater velocities, vegetative cover, caves, sinkholes and springs. And we'll hear about recent research findings from the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA).

Geary has been Director/Chief Technical Officer, Aquifer Science, Edwards Aquifer Authority since 1999. Before coming to the EAA he worked on Superfund sites, solid waste landfills, and water resource projects. He has consulted on water issues in Central and South America.

Aug 23 Friday: Let's Party!

La Fogata restaurant, 2427 Vance Jackson Rd, 6-8 pm.

Aug 28 Wednesday: at Lion's Field

The Air We Breathe by Bullfrog Films, 49 mins, 1996.

With insight and wit, this film examines our addiction to the automobile, the environmental consequences of suburban sprawl, and the damaging effects of commuter culture on both the air we breathe and our overall quality of life. Also discusses rising rates of asthma and other respiratory diseases.

Sept 17 Tuesday: membership meeting

Wildlife Conservation Issues in Texas - What Does the Future Hold? by Judith Green.

There are many issues today that threaten the great wildlife diversity of our state, but the conservation community has faced seemingly insurmountable challenges before and rose to the challenge. We can rise to the challenge again.

Texas is blessed with a vast array of habitats and species. Texas boasts 213 species of reptiles and amphibians, 635 species of birds, 174 species of mammals, an estimated 5,200 species of plants and 30,000 species of invertebrates. However, complex and daunting issues like emerging diseases, climate change, urbanization, insufficient land use planning, emerging energy production industries, and declining conservation funding are putting intense pressures on our state's wildlife populations. But the conservation community has faced seemingly insurmountable challenges but rose to the challenge in the 1930s and 1970s. With dedication, we can rise to the challenge again and secure a solid future for wildlife in Texas.

For additional information, see the [website](#) of TPWD's Wildlife Diversity program and the YouTube channel [webpage](#).

Judith Green is a 24 year employee of Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept. She has been an Urban Wildlife Biologist in San Antonio for the past 19 years conducting outreach and technical guidance on conservation of natural resources that benefit wildlife, landscapes, and water. She, along with many others, founded the first chapter of Texas Master Naturalists, in San Antonio, in 1996. She's also a contributing author and photographer for *Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife*, a Texas A&M Press guidebook.

Sept 25 Wednesday: at Lion's Field

Pointless Pollution by Bullfrog Films, 28 mins, 1989.

Is 80% of runoff into oceans the result of non-point source pollution? This film addresses four situations, including Barton Springs and the Highland Lakes chain in Texas.

Sept 27 Friday: Let's Party!

Little Italy restaurant, 824 Afterglow St, 6-8 pm.

October 15 Tuesday: membership meeting

Topic to be announced.

October 23 Wednesday: at Lion's Field

Great Hikes in West Texas: Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park by Kevin Hartley. Kevin will talk about some of the best hikes in these parks, plus planning resources and challenges. Some route map images and a few of Kevin's favorite pictures from these parks will be shown. Kevin is a Sierra Club outings leader and Wilderness First Responder.

Announcements

Mid-year Funding Appeal

It's that time again....our annual conservation fund appeal. Much of the environmental work we do entails some cost, which is often borne by those of us who also volunteer our time to administrate and act on conservation issues. The funds are necessary for the Witte rent, our quarterly print newsletter, numerous conservation campaigns, and student outreach and education.

Please help us to continue our mission. We appreciate any donation, even small amounts. If each member were to just give \$1 dollar, then we could raise about \$2000. Make your check payable to the Alamo Sierra Club and mail it to POB 6443, San Antonio, TX 78209.

Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support the Sierra Club's effective citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts.

Bamberger Ranch Preserve Tour

Eight of us went to this Meetup event June 19th at the Bamberger Ranch Preserve. We did the tour, which included views of the expansive grasslands and the bat cave. Most impressive about the ranch, with its grasslands with areas of mixed junipers and other native trees, is the explanation by the staff that the entire 5500 acre

ranch forty years ago was one of worst pieces of ranch land in the state. The ranch has won many awards for habitat restoration.

We also drove through the large area dedicated to the scimitar-horned oryx breeding program. This animal is extinct in it's native habitat but is protected in zoos and a few preserves such as this one.

For more information on the ranch see bambergerranch.org.

Thanks to Alamo Group Outings Leader Linda Higby for leading this event. See the [Meetup](#) calendar for the current schedule of all Group outings.

Contributions

Staying Cooler at Home: Part I

By John B. Hertz, Architect & Green Building Contact

As the world spins around the sun, its tilted axis exposes the northern hemisphere to more solar radiation in the summer. The noon sun now is high in the sky, almost straight up over south Texas. As a result, the sun beats unmercifully downward, heating everything, including the buildings where we live and work. Most cooling uses mechanical air-conditioning systems, which in San Antonio are largely powered by fossil fuels. To reduce our ecological foot prints and protect our wallets, there are steps that can be taken to keep cool in a more environmentally and economically friendly manner. First we'll look at staying cooler by examining the roof.

In the summer the sun pounds down on the roof and eventually that heat works its way into the house. If at all possible, the best thing is to keep the sun off the roof. This is where landscaping plays a critical role. A well-positioned, large deciduous tree is worth a ton of free air-conditioning. Considering the cost of air-conditioning, a mature shade tree, professionally planted, will pay off quickly. If your budget is more limited, a smaller tree should start to shade within five years. CPS exhausted its tree rebate program funds, but hopefully they will find more soon. Pick a tree that's native and relatively fast growing. See the CPS website for good advice.

At some point in time your old roof will probably need replacement. Think about a lighter color replacement that will reflect sunlight away. It will absorb less than half the radiation of a darker one. Consider a metal roof which would allow you to also harvest rainwater.

Finally, the most impact you can have for the least investment is found up in the attic. Take a tape measure and see how deep the insulation is over the ceilings. If it's about 6 inches, it is inadequate. CPS will help by subsidizing additional insulation for your attic, up to \$0.25 per square foot, which is about 25-30% of the total cost. There are some limitations, so see the CPS website. The payback period for this investment is very quick and offers a higher level of home comfort both summer and winter long. While you're in the attic, check to see that it's ventilated. Think about a solar-powered attic fan to help keep the attic cooler, which also will help increase the life of your shingle roof.

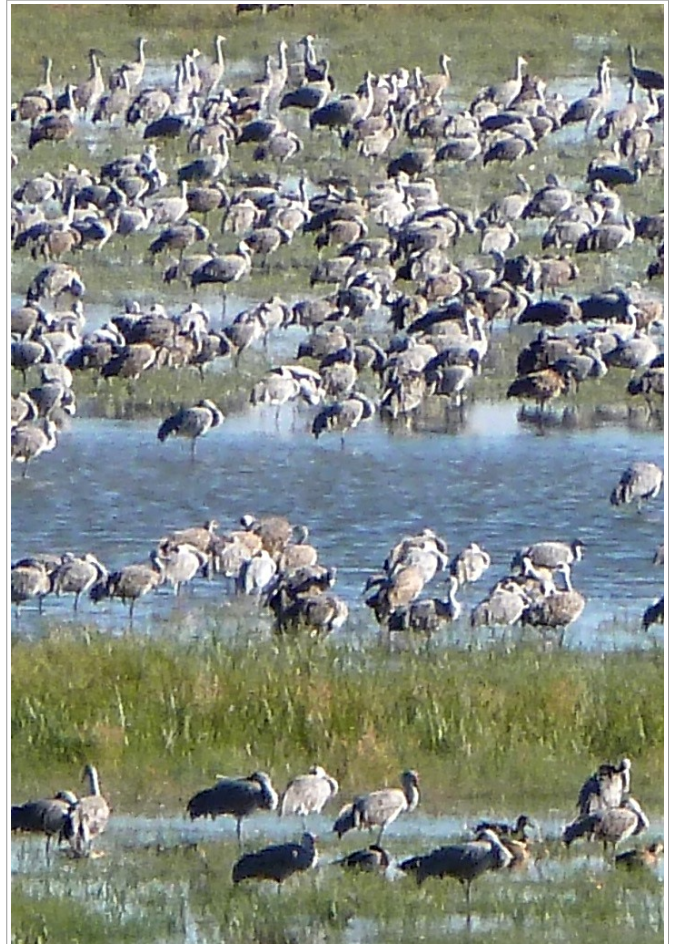
- To be continued next issue -

A Crane Epiphany

By Kevin Hartley

I visited Bitter Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, near Roswell New Mexico, in October last year. Probably like most of us, I thought I understood what the NWRs are for and had visited a few earlier.

But I was astounded by what I saw. Uncountable (at least by me) thousands of sandhill cranes there for the winter. The image below shows a tiny fraction of those cranes (the full pic makes a nice screen background, e-mail me at kevinh@ktc.com if you would like the file).



There are six subspecies of sandhill cranes of which three are endangered. The greater sandhill crane subspecies was nearly extinct in 1940, but now there are around 100,000, and of the most numerous subspecies, the lesser sandhill crane, there are 400,000.

The migratory populations of sandhills range from the northern US, Canada and Siberia in summers to the southern US and Mexico in winters. En route many of these birds depend upon protected land along a short stretch of the North Platte River in Nebraska.

Wintering sandhills can be seen in Texas at Muleshoe NWR west of Lubbock October through March. Sandhills, like many migratory birds, are dependent upon NWRs like these due to the conversion of vast wetlands, grasslands and forests to croplands over the last 150 years or so.

Aldo Leopold wrote in *Marshland Elegy* (1937), "When

we hear his call we hear no mere bird. We hear the trumpet in the orchestra of evolution. He is the symbol of our untameable past, of that incredible sweep of millennia which underlies and conditions the daily affairs of birds and men."

This refers to sandhill cranes, and seems more meaningful when we realize it was written when the bird was approaching extinction. This was quoted in *The Birds of Heaven: Travels With Cranes* by Peter Matthiessen, a book about the fifteen species of cranes found around the world.

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Food for thought

Instead of controlling the environment for the benefit of the population, perhaps it is time to control the population to allow the survival of the environment.

-David Attenborough

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Alamo Group of the Sierra Club

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